

Lazarus J. (2015) Did the Scottish National Party benefit from ingroup bias? *The Psychologist*, 28, 8, 610.

Below is the letter as submitted. The published version was slightly edited.

Following recent articles (May 2015) and letters (June and July 2015) in *The Psychologist* on the election and referenda might psychological principles also help to explain the most striking outcomes of the General Election: the extraordinary and surprising success of the Scottish National Party (a gain of 50 seats) and the equally, but perhaps less surprising, failure of the Liberal Democrats (a loss of 49 seats)? Could such large changes in voting behaviour be due to political factors alone or might something of a more general psychological nature have been going on? I offer two propositions for discussion.

In spite of its result the Scottish referendum, by making more salient all things Scottish, elevated feelings of Scottish identity in Scottish minds and stimulated engagement with Scottish issues. This had repercussions for a powerful social phenomenon: they enhanced positive in-group (i.e. Scottish) feelings, and perhaps also feelings of derogation towards an out-group: the English. The following thoughts consider how this psychological effect might have played out in voting behaviour, distinguishing three types of voter.

For some, the pros and cons of Scottish independence played little or no part in their voting decision and an increase in in-group feeling was sufficient for them to vote SNP. A second group had voted for independence in the referendum, or had become independence minded as a result of the in-group effect. The third group were uncertain about independence but wanted to see the SNP in action in parliament, so as to turn their uncertainty into something more decided. But all were pushed in the direction of voting SNP as a result of an in-group bias.

Could such a powerful swing to the SNP have occurred without engaging a strong psychological tendency like in-group favouritism, and could this have happened without the strong stimulus of the recent referendum for Scottish independence?

The Liberal Democrat case is more complex but might their collapse also be explained in part by a very general and simple psychological process? Being a minority in a coalition government made their distinctive policies more difficult to detect, until the last few weeks before the election when the gloves were off.

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